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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: ANNUAL OVERSEAS SECURITY ADVISORY  
COUNCIL (OSAC) CRIME AND SAFETY REPORT

REF: 08 SECSTATE 132056

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

11. (SBU) Overall Crime and Safety Situation.

1A. Crime Threat Levels.

Crime is a serious problem in Argentina, but one that can be managed with common sense precautions. Street crime has become common and increasingly more violent, and often is perpetrated with a firearm or other deadly weapon. It is estimated that there are 540,000 unregistered weapons in Argentina ([www.clarin.com](http://www.clarin.com)). The office within the government of Argentina that regulates firearms, Registro Nacional de Armas, stated that since the start of their 2007 "Money for Weapons" program a total of 104,782 weapons have been effectively seized ([desarmevoluntario.gov.ar](http://desarmevoluntario.gov.ar)).

Criminal activity is concentrated in urban areas, especially Greater Buenos Aires, Cordoba, Rosario, and Mendoza. The wealthier parts of metro Buenos Aires experience high rates of property crime, with high-income neighborhoods often registering twice as many complaints as some of the poorer parts of town (this may be a result of better or more frequent reporting by influential citizens living in these areas).

In the countryside, there have been a few robberies in isolated areas and occasional burglaries of hotel rooms in resort areas. For the third consecutive year, Mendoza was the site of a robbery involving multiple victims. Without harming the victims, the criminals stole \$15,000 Arg pesos, jewelry, and electronic devices from individuals in a Mendoza hotel. Highway robbery largely affects commercial vehicles and hijacking of inter-city buses is uncommon.

A study titled "Mapa da Violencia: Os jovens da America Latina 2008" (Map of Violence: Young People in Latin America 2008), by the Brazil-based Latin American Technological Network (RITLA), published in November 2008 by the Brazilian Federal Government, showed that the level of violence in Argentina is by no means the worst in Latin America.

Using data from the World Health Organization for 2003 to 2006, the study reports that there were 5.8 murders a year per 100,000 population in Argentina, slightly higher than the 4.5 per 100,000 in Uruguay and 5.4 in Chile.

Although homicides are down in Argentina, violent street crime in urban areas is increasing. Statistics are not available but urban crime includes: pick pocketing/purse snatching, scams, mugging, express kidnapping, residential burglary, home invasion, thefts from vehicles (smash and grab), sexual assaults/rape, car theft and carjacking. Short-term visitors to urban areas are subject to all types of street crime, but report few problems with public transportation or with four-and five-star hotels.

Thieves specifically target expensive jewelry and watches, especially high-value items such as Rolexes. There have been several recent reports of stolen U.S. passports from American tourists visiting Buenos Aires. Some of these were stolen in a violent manner -- to include at gunpoint. Long-term residents are subject to the full range of criminal activity on the street while driving, traveling, and at home.

Crimes involving children are also significant and on the rise in Argentina. The following statistics are derived from a study made with judicial sources in Buenos Aires and was reported by the web news portal Infobae: "Los homicidios cometidos por menores de 16 años se cuadruplicaron en un año" (Homicides committed by minors under 16 years of age quadrupled in one year).

- Index of crime committed by children under the age of 16 years old increased almost 80% in 2008.

- Index of homicide committed by children that are between the ages of 14 and 16 years old increased almost 47% between January and September 2008.

- Index of theft committed by children between the ages of 14 and 16 years old increased 20%.

- Index of sexual abuses committed by children under the age of 16 years old increased almost 6%.

- Index of resistance to authority committed by children under the age of 16 years old increased almost 113%.

- Index of causes related to unlawful imprisonment committed by children under the age of 16 years old increased almost 77%.

Many criminals are armed and ready to use their weapons at the first sign of resistance. Crimes occur at all hours and armed robberies often take place during business hours. Favorite targets for armed robberies are banks and businesses dealing in cash or high-value merchandise. Apartment invasions and burglaries are common, and occasionally entire buildings are taken hostage. Criminals regularly employ target-of-opportunity tactics -- that is, they go through neighborhoods and apartment buildings ringing doorbells and robbing those who open the door.

## 11B. Road Safety.

Traffic accidents are still the primary threat to life and limb in Argentina, especially in Buenos Aires. Pedestrians should be vigilant when crossing streets and remember to look in both directions, even if the street is designated one way.

Traffic laws are not routinely obeyed and vehicles often travel at excessive speeds. A recently published report in [www.popularonline.com.ar](http://www.popularonline.com.ar) states that there was a 1.25 percent increase in the year 2008 relating to traffic deaths throughout the country -- 8205 people died in vehicle accidents during the year as opposed to 8104 deaths in 2007.

In the city of Buenos Aires, the number of fatalities increased by 9.4 percent during 2008 despite government efforts to strengthen road safety awareness.

## 12. (SBU) Political Violence.

#### 1A. Historical Perspective.

While the Government of Argentina (GOA) or its agents have not recently committed any politically motivated killings, there were reports that police were involved in killings involving unwarranted or excessive force. Authorities investigated and, in some cases, detained, prosecuted, and convicted the officers involved.

Despite the negative perception of various USG policies, Argentines are relatively friendly to Americans, and visitors are unlikely to experience any anti-American sentiment.

#### 1B. Terrorism.

There is no known operational terrorist activity in Argentina, but international terrorists in 1992 destroyed the Israeli Embassy, killing 29 persons, and in 1994 destroyed the AMIA community center, killing 85 persons. Care should be exercised when traveling in Brazil and Paraguay, near the Argentine border. Organizations working out of the Paraguayan side of the frontier are involved in the trafficking of illicit goods and other illicit contraband, and some individuals in the area have been designated by the U.S. Treasury Department for financially supporting terrorist organizations.

#### 1C. Civil Unrest.

There are weekly demonstrations in Greater Buenos Aires and frequent demonstrations in other major cities. Most protests are related to domestic economic and political issues including labor disputes. U.S. interests are occasionally targeted based on current events, such as the recent

expulsion of the U.S. Ambassador in Bolivia, U.S. military presence in the region, the Iraq War, or policy toward Cuba. The largest and most disruptive protests, ranging from dozens to thousands of participants, are usually sponsored by the "piqueteros" (a collection of "social activist" groups whose main tactic is to block roads).

In Buenos Aires, demonstrations most commonly occur downtown and often end up at the Plaza de Mayo, Casa Rosada, Congress, or the monument on 9 de Julio. Protesters generally come from labor unions, unemployed/underemployed/landless movements, student groups, and the political left. While most protests are peaceful, there are "hooligan" elements that periodically show up to fight the police and/or engage in vandalism. Furthermore, the use of sound systems, fireworks, and musical instruments is a common occurrence as well as the burning of effigies and flags.

Pipe bombs or incendiary attacks have been occasionally used during the more violent demonstrations. Targets in recent years have included U.S. bank branches, municipal or public utility offices, McDonald's restaurants, and Blockbuster Video stores. In July 2008 there was a violent clash between police and Quebracho protestors in downtown Buenos Aires near several commercial businesses. Protestors threw stones at police who responded with tear gas and batons. The altercation escalated when protestors threw Molotov cocktails at nearby vehicles and buildings.

The police are generally restrained unless directly attacked.

In addition to the organized demonstrations, there are occasional, spontaneous protests by groups of displaced workers, unemployed persons, unpaid pensioners, people upset by electricity cuts, etc.

#### 13. (SBU) Post Specific Concerns.

##### 1A. Environmental.

Argentina experiences occasional flooding along the coast, including parts of Buenos Aires, and in low-lying parts of the interior, such as Santa Fe Province.

Western/northwestern provinces, such as Mendoza, Salta, Jujuy, and Tucuman periodically have earthquakes.

#### B. Industrial and Transportation Accidents.

Road conditions are good, but traffic is fast throughout the country and heavy in the big cities. Drivers are very aggressive and oblivious to lane designations and many other traffic laws. As addressed earlier, the accident rate is very high.

#### C. Kidnappings.

Express kidnapping (short duration/low ransom) continues along with conventional mugging. Extortion kidnapping for ransom has so far only affected well-off Argentines. The true rate of kidnapping is unknown, but believed to be considerably lower than in Brazil or Colombia. Virtual kidnapping, a telephone scam in which the caller claims to have kidnapped someone who is simply not at home, continues to be a regular occurrence. There are many variations of the virtual kidnapping scam. One such variation, which appears to be on the rise, is the caller claims that a family member has been involved in a horrific accident and personal information is needed for on-scene medical authorities. Once personal information is divulged, the caller becomes more aggressive and uses the newly acquired information to extort valuables. Such calls often come from jails and the callers ask for prepaid phone cards, which are a form of money inside prisons.

#### D. Drugs and Narcoterrorism.

Argentina is considered a major transit country for drugs, primarily for cocaine going to Europe and marijuana going from Paraguay to Chile. As a result, consumer quantities of both these drugs remain in Buenos Aires for local consumption. Media reports cite the growing use of cocaine and other derivatives by middle-class youths. A highly

addictive and popular form of cocaine termed "paco" (similar to crack cocaine) is also sold on the local market mostly to youthful poorer clientele. Colombian heroin trafficking is increasing as 5 to 10 kilogram quantities are regularly smuggled into Argentina from Bolivia in the Northern Border.

#### 4. (U) Police Response.

##### A. Handling of Police Detention or Harassment Incidents.

Argentine law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the GOA generally observes these prohibitions; however, there are reports of the police arresting and detaining citizens arbitrarily on occasion.

Expatriates can generally expect better police response and less harassment than in many other Latin American countries. Individuals detained by the police should ask to contact the Embassy or consulate. In Buenos Aires, the Tourist Police are very responsive and assist many tourists with language services to file police reports.

Checkpoints are common, especially around Buenos Aires, and drivers must have all documentation, including passport or Argentine identification card, drivers license, vehicle registration and proof of third-party liability insurance. If a police officer asks for a bribe, immediately report this occurrence to the Embassy.

##### B. Local Police Contact Information.

- For all emergencies (Capital Federal and Buenos Aires Province): 911

- Argentine Federal Police: 4383-1111/2-9; Av. Morneo 1550, Capital Federal

- Prefectura (Coast Guard): 4318-7558 or 4318-7400; Av.

Macacha Guemes 150, Capital Federal

- Tourist Police: 4346-5748; Corrientes 436, Capital Federal
- Bomberos (Fire Department): 100 or 4951-2222, 4381-2222, 4383-2222; Av. Moreno 1550, Capital Federal

15. (U) Local Hospital and Clinic Contact Information.

1A. Capital Federal (City of Buenos Aires):

- SAME (Municipal Emergency Medical Service): 107 or 4923-1051/9
- Hospital Fernandez: 4808-2600; Cervino 3356, Capital Federal
- Hospital Aleman: 4821-1700; Pueyrredon 1640, Capital Federal
- Sanatorio Trinidad: 4127-5555; Cervino 4720, Capital Federal

1B. Buenos Aires Province (San Isidro, suburbs):

- San Isidro: 4512-3700; JJ Diaz 818, San Isidro
- San Lucas: 4732-8888; Belgrano 369, San Isidro
- Sanatorio Trinidad: 4793-6766; Fleming 590, San Isidro

16. (U) Travel Precautions.

1A. Theft of Valuables.

- Carry Cash: \$100-\$200 USD or \$300-\$400 Arg pesos. Criminals in Argentina frequently resort to violence if they perceive a victim is being uncooperative or if the target does not have anything worth stealing. The people most likely to be attacked or beaten are those without any money. If confronted, offer no resistance and immediately hand over everything demanded.
- Do not wear Rolexes, or other flashy or expensive jewelry that draws attention. Women should safeguard their purses while walking and when eating in restaurants or cafes.
- Criminals are often well-dressed and crime can occur anytime during the day at any location. Use common sense and remain vigilant. Travel in groups when possible. Always stay in well lit, populated areas and avoid parks after dark.
- Be alert to pickpocketing in tourist and shopping areas. Do not flash large amounts of cash, or carry expensive-looking bags, briefcases, or laptop cases in public.
- Do not carry all of your important documents in your wallet or purse. Carry a photocopy of your passport.
- Use ATM machines located in public places like the hotel, shopping mall, or event venue. If the booth has a door, make sure it closes behind you.
- If you are in a restaurant or other business that gets robbed, follow the instructions of the robbers and hand over valuables on demand.
- MUSTARD ON THE BACK SCAM: Unknown to you, a liquid is squirted on your back. After a few steps, someone, often a middle-aged woman, will inform you that you have something on your back and offer to help clean it off. Meanwhile, she or an accomplice picks your pockets. This scam has been used regularly in tourist areas such as San Telmo, La Boca, 9 de Julio, Recoleta, and Florida Street. Fortunately, this is one of the least confrontational crimes; just say "NO" and walk away.
- Pay with exact change as much as possible. If you pay for a small item with a large bill, you risk being shortchanged or getting counterfeit in change. Only take pesos as change.

- Use credit cards only at the hotel and major stores and restaurants. Watch your bills carefully for fraudulent charges.

#### 1B. Forms of Transportation.

- Remises (hired car and driver) are the best and safest form of public transportation. They normally charge by the kilometer and are reasonably priced. Hotels, many restaurants, and shopping centers can call one from an established service.

- Radio taxis are the next best choice. Taxis are black and yellow in the Capital, and white with blue lettering in the Provinces.

- Avoid black and yellow taxis with the word "Mandataria" on the door. These taxis are rented on a daily or hourly basis and are often involved in criminal acts.

- Do not take rides offered by people on the street or outside an airport.

- The following is in order of preference is recommended: a) Call for a remise or taxi, b) take one from an established stand, c) hail one on the street (but not in front of a bank).

- Use the seatbelts, lock the doors, and keep windows up. Do not place your purse or other valuables on the seats, in plain view from the outside or unattended.

- Subways, buses, and trains are safe but watch out for pickpockets and be ready for work stoppages.

- Watch your bags at airports, bus, and ship terminals.

#### 17. (U) Embassy Contact Information.

Buenos Aires OSAC formally meets every quarter. The Washington, D.C. based OSAC Regional Coordinator for WHA or the Regional Security Office at American Embassy Buenos Aires can provide more information.

- American Embassy: 54-11-5777-4533; Av Colombia 4300, Capital Federal

- Regional Security Office: 54-11-5777-4298; Av Colombia 4300, Capital Federal

- Marine Post One (24-hours): 54-115777-4873; Av Colombia 4300, Capital Federal

18. (U) The points of contact are RSO Scott Campbell at 54-11-5777-4535 and A/RSO Jesse Thomas at 54-11-5777-4337.  
WAYNE